KirtiMukha and Jalandhara

The naked yogi

Indra and Brihaspati are on their way to mount Kailas when they come across a naked rishi. His hair is matted. His skin pale. But he has a powerful aura. Indra asks him if they can find Shiva on top of Kailas. The naked rishi just scratches himself and continues to block their path.

Indra raises his Vajra angrily. But the yogi freezes Indra's hand by chanting an occult mantra. Indra shrinks back in horror. The yogi's eyes are red with rage. His forehead is twitching ominously. And his stance petrifies them. Brihaspati recognizes Shiva. He pulls Indra down, asks him to prostrate before Shiva and beg him for forgiveness before it is too late. Indra does so. Immediately.

Brihaspati addresses Shiva with love and says, "Bhaktavatsala, forgive Indra for not recognizing you. He has erred. But he is your devotee too."Shiva bursts out laughing. He is delighted by his new name and says, "I forgive you Indra. So I will cast the fury in my forehead into the ocean." The next instant, Shiva plucks the Agni in his brow and flings it into the distant sea. They then return to their respective abodes.

Brahma's prophecy

The fire from Shiva's third eye sizzles in the Sindhu Sagar Sangam. The next instant a radiant boy is born there. Brahma flies down to see the exceptional boy playing in Varuna's lap. Brahma tries to perform the birth rites and read the lines on the

child’s hands. But before he can do so, the child seizes Brahma’s throat and shakes his head so violently that tears spring out of Brahma’s eyes. Brahma extricates himself from the boy’s grasp and says, “This boy brought tears to my eyes. So he is Jalandhara.” He then opens the tiny fists and declares, “This boy will become a man within a day. He will be as valorous as Kartikeya. He will defeat Vishnu in battle and Shiva alone can kill him. I can’t say who his parents are because those lines are missing but he will marry a wonderful woman whose chastity will make him invincible.” Brahma asks Sukra, the guru of the asuras to guide him and disappears.

Jalandhara

Within hours Jaladhara grows into a strapping young man. He marries Vrinda, Kaalanemi’s daughter. Sukracharya crowns Jalandhara the king of asuras. All the asuras come out of hiding when they hear the good news. Peace and prosperity finally prevail in their land.

Jalandhara learns about how the devious devas had duped them out of their share of Amrita during the Samudra Manthan. His heart burns with vengeance but his anger is stoked even further when he sees Rahu’s headless body. He knows how Vishnu cut off Rahu’s head when he tried to drink the Soma which was rightfully theirs anyway.

He looks at Sukracharya and says, “Only you have the power of resurrection – the Sanjivini vidya. How then do these devas rise back after they die in the battles that we wage with them?” Sukracharya says, “Brihaspati brings the dead devas back to

life using the life-giving herbs that grow on Dronagiri.” So Jalandhara uproots the entire mountain of Drona and flings it into the sea. Now there is no need for him to engage in any war with the devas because the frightened devas have fled from Swarga. Jalandhara now reigns supreme over Patala, Prithvi and Swarga.

Vishnu, Jalandhara and Lakshmi

The devas rush to Vaikunta and ask Vishnu to help them. Vishnu promises to help them. But Lakshmi stops him and says, “What kind of justice is this? How can my husband kill my brother?” Vishnu looks at her and says, “I cannot kill Jalandhara. Shiva will. But I have to support the devas too.”

Vishnu and Jalandhara engage in an extremely fierce battle. One fine day, in the midst of the war, Vishnu looks at Jalandhara and says, “I have never been worshipped me with so many different kinds of blows before. Ask me for whatever you desire and it shall be yours.” Jalandhara looks at Vishnu with respect and says, “Bring my sister Lakshmi with you and stay in my house.” Much to the devas distress, Vishnu instantly agrees to do so and goes away to Jalandhara’s house along with Lakshmi.

Shiva and Narada

The devas approach Shiva now. Shiva asks Narada to do the needful. Narada saunters into Jalandhara’s court casually one day and says, “O Jalandhara, you are virtuous, kind, wealthy and the ruler of the three worlds. Your people are happy and

safe now. Yet Shiva has an edge over you. He has Uma as his wife. How Uma likes to live with a naked yogi on a barren mountain is beyond my understanding. All I know is that she deserves to be the wife of the ultimate ruler of the cosmos." Narada then walks out of Jalandhara's court.

KirtiMukha

Distraught, Jalandhara calls Rahu, asks him to go to Mount Kailas and deliver a message to Shiva which says, "I, Jalandhara, am the master of the three worlds. Hand over Uma to me else wage a war with me." Rahu watches the slight smile on Shiva's lips with awe. The tension is palpable. Suddenly a huge bolt of lightning emerges out of Shiva's third eye along with a clap of ominous thunder. Shiva flips open his third eye. Again.

A grotesque being with a lion's face springs out of it. It has a fanged mouth from which a snake's forked tongue flickers open. The creature's eyes radiate live flames of fire. Rahu flees for his life. But the monster catches him near the mouth of the cave. It opens its mouth wide, intent of devouring him when Rahu shrieks out in terror, "Mahadeva, save me!"

Shiva says, "Let the asura go. He seeks my protection." Shiva looks at the gratitude in Rahu's eyes and allows him to leave the cave. The creature in the cave, however, howls with hunger and says, "You took away the prey I was born to devour. My hunger torments me like a curse. How do I appease it now?" Shiva looks at him in annoyance and says, "If you are so tormented by your hunger, why don't you eat yourself?"

The creature growls gratefully, chomps through its own bones, chews on his delicious flesh and drinks his own blood thirstily. Only the lion's head of the creature remains suspended in mid-air. It grins and licks its lips in total satisfaction now.

Shiva looks at him delightedly and says, "O unique monster, from now on you will be known as Kirtimukha, the face of fame. You shall be my Dwarapalaka. People will worship you before they worship me."

The rest of the story is familiar. Shiva, with Uma's and Vishnu's support, defeats Jalandhara, his own son who is born from the fire in his eyes. And the devas get to rule over their kingdom, Swarga after that.

Anger: Our enemy

Jalandhara and KirtiMukha are children born from Shiva's fury. Despite all his virtues, Jalandhara could not curb his inherent anger. He blazes a trail of destruction and ends up destroying himself too in the process. Kirtimukha's plight is the same. Maybe that is why Shiva asked KirtiMukha to become his dwarapalaka – to serve as a grim reminder to all of us: That we will never get all that we yearn for in our lives. Like Shiva, we should outgrow our never-ending hungers, channelize our negative energy and retain our equanimity at all times. Or like Jalandhara and KirtiMukha, our pride and our endless hungers will destroy us. And all that we will be left with is - our false sense of pride – our ego.